DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 644 SP 032 879

AUTHOR Clarke, Robert; Snow, Gordon
TITLE Relating the Curriculum Study to Staff Development.
PUB DATE 17 Nov 90
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (15th, Orlando, FL, November 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; Audits (Verification); Board of Education Policy; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Evaluation; *Curriculum Research; Educational Needs; Educational Principles; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Needs Assessment; *Program Development; *Staff Development
IDENTIFIERS *Curriculum Audits

ABSTRACT

Staff development is a school district activity that is generating more activity and becoming more expensive. As the amount of dollars spent increases, so will the demands for accountability and results. Traditional methods for determining staff development programs are inadequate or incomplete. A more effective method is to relate the staff development activities to a comprehensive curriculum study, such as a curriculum audit. The result will be that the activities related to staff development will also be related to correcting recognized weaknesses in the curriculum. The concept of a curriculum audit and its subsequent stages are described, and an outline is given of the steps taken to conduct such an audit by the Crestwood (PA) School District. It is noted that not all audit recommendations can be addressed through staff development and that some latitude for staff-initiated staff development activities should be provided, preferably after the audit and its recommendations are made available for scrutiny.
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RELATING THE CURRICULUM STUDY TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Robert Clarke, Ed.D., Assistant Professor,
Bloomsburg University (Bloomsburg, PA)
Gordon Snow, Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools,
Crestwood School District (Mountaintop, PA)

ED330644

A paper presented at the Eighteenth Annual conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education. November 17, 1990. Orlando, Florida. Hyatt Regency Orlando.

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Robert Clarke, Ed.D. Assistant Professor,
Bloomsburg University (PA).
Gordon Snow, Ed.D. Superintendent,
Crestwood School District (PA).

Inservice consists of such a [illegible]rkshops, short courses, visiting other schools, observing other tea[illegible] and small group minicourses. For purposes of this presentation, inservice and staff development are used interchangeably. Conceived broadly, staff development includes any activity or process intended to improve skills, attitudes, understandings, or performance in present or future roles. (Little, In Press).

A significant problem related to directing and controlling inservice is that it is a high profile activity that is growing in prominence. In essence, it is big business, and it is subject to political maneuvering and territorial disputes. In actuality, it is perceived as an important strategy for improving education, but it is often separated from or unrelated to a proper focus for improving educational programs (Fullan, 1990).

Research provides evidence that staff development and school achievement are related. Stallings (1989) has provided the evidence by showing that improved teaching generated improvements in reading practice in secondary students. It seems beneficial then, if substantial amounts of time and money will be dedicated to staff development, that the staff development activities be related to improving student learning. The position taken here is that the most appropriate needs assessment instrument to guide or determine staff development activities is a comprehensive curriculum study.

Curriculum studies come in various shapes and sizes. The most recent strategy for analyzing curriculum is the curriculum audit devised by Fenwick English. The theoretical concept supporting the audit is that there should exist interrelationships between the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the tested curriculum. This interrelationship is supported not only because of educational practicality, but also because of logic. Why test something that has not been taught? If testing reveals a weakness, why not revise the curriculum? Why doesn't the taught curriculum reflect the written curriculum?

Curriculum audits, as described by English (1988), employ techniques similar to financial audits in that district practices are compared against "effective" practices. The audits can encompass varying degrees of comprehensiveness. Obviously, the more comprehensive the audit, the more recommendations from the auditor. More recommendations generate more activities for the staff development program.

If we view curriculum in the broad sense, encompassing courses of study, objectives, instructional activities, and evaluation techniques, then a curriculum study can be very comprehensive and very revealing. It can also focus on weaknesses related to the primary mission of schools i.e., educating children. When staff development programs help teachers and administrators work more effectively with students, the mission of improving education can be accomplished.

A common approach to conducting a needs assessment is to look as some specific hard data and to analyze the responses to questionnaires and/or opinionnaires. Often, most of the effort is devoted to obtaining and analyzing people's opinions, and then planning the staff development program to focus on the perceived weaknesses. Since staff development programs resulting from such needs analysis are

so often criticized by faculty and administration, it seems reasonable to assume that a different approach to needs analysis might be warranted.

A study of curriculum that is comprehensive in nature seems to have merit. The goal of such a study is to see how well the curriculum, in the broad sense, is functioning. The next step is to point out weaknesses and make recommendations for improvement. The process of evaluating curriculum, identifying weaknesses, and recommending improvements are activities that are directly related to the main mission of schools -- teaching children.

The curriculum audit is one of the types of curriculum studies available to schools to use as a needs assessment instrument. The advantages of a curriculum audit (or other type of study) are: they focus on curriculum they look seriously at hard data; they can be comprehensive enough to consider all variables affecting curriculum, they utilize questionnaires and interviews; they can obtain information over long periods (90-270 days), and they are signed by a curriculum research or expert. The fact that it is signed indicates that someone is assuming responsibility for the accuracy of the report.

The discussion here will focus on the curriculum audit as the needs assessment instrument, but other types of curriculum evaluations can also serve the purpose. Regardless of the type of evaluation employed, the following minimum activities should be conducted.

1. Analyze data on failure and dropout rates.
2. Obtain information on students who "fall through the gap."
3. Analyze attendance records.
4. Review suspensions and expulsions.
5. Analyze student achievement.

6. Survey the "perceptions" of interest groups, e.g., citizens, parents, faculty.
7. Review previous curriculum and management studies, including reports from accreditating agencies.
8. Review the impact of previous staff development activities.
9. Identify priorities common to all units and/or buildings.
10. Review existing long and short range plans.

A useful purpose for the above list is that a district can engage a curriculum consultant by using the 10 items as minimum discussion points, and then use the expertise of district personnel and the consultant to arrive at the total components of the study. The 10 items are not cast in bronze. Some curriculum people may add additional components, others may minimize the importance of one or more of the 10 items. The best (or revised) list will get people focused on what is happening to kids.

The curriculum audit as described and employed by English (1988) compares a school district's curriculum-related functions to five standards of effective operation. These standards are:

- The school district is able to demonstrate its control of resources, programs, and personnel.
- The school district has established clear and valid objectives for students.
- The school district has documentation explaining how its programs have been developed, implemented, and conducted.
- The school district uses the results from the district designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices.
- The school district has been able to improve productivity.

These audit standards are considered judgmental criteria. Data, information, and evidence are assembled during the auditing process. The information obtained is then compared to the standards, and a final report is generated. The standards are research-based assumptions about such things as curriculum, instruction, and management practices. The standards and their related assumptions and benchmarks have legitimacy because some have been empirically validated (e.g., "effective schools research"), some are logically derived, and some are the "expert" opinions of the people involved in the audit (English, 1988).

The curriculum audit was commissioned by the Crestwood (Pa.) School District because there was growing concern among teachers, administrators, elected officials, and the public that this respected school district was showing signs of wear. Administrative turnover was too common. Board - teacher relationships were deteriorating. Parents were voicing too many legitimate concerns.

When the auditor (co-author) was commissioned to perform the audit, he was reluctant to begin a full-scale study of any kind, because his personal knowledge of the district led him to the conclusion that the district's operations were basically very sound, and that a full-blown audit would not be a wise use of the district's money or his time. In order to make decisions on the appropriateness of the audit and to determine which standards to measure the curriculum against, the auditor (co-author) embarked on a fact-finding mission, and the main informer was to be the Superintendent of Schools.

It would be helpful to learn some descriptive information about the district, such as growth patterns, faculty-administration-board relationships, how curriculum is managed, and any other issues that were working below the surface. It also seemed like a good idea to ask the superintendent directly why he wanted an audit. The

auditor was somewhat surprised to learn that the board's position on curriculum, "hands off, but keep us informed," played a role in pursuing the audit.

After gaining the above information, the auditor (co-author) decided that a comprehensive audit, pursued aggressively, was warranted. The standards were revised to reflect the situation. The standards applied were:

- The school district has procedures for insuring curriculum quality control.
- The school district has established and implemented programs (courses of study) containing legitimate and measurable student objectives, and the curriculum is articulated and monitored.
- The school district has an adequate testing program and results are utilized properly.
- The school district's budgeting process adequately considers program needs and building considerations.
- The school district engages in and utilizes long range planning for curriculum improvement.

A discussion of the benchmarks related to the standards would not be appropriate here. They can be obtained by reviewing Curriculum Auditing by English or by contacting the co-author at Bloomsburg University (Pa). It seems essential at this point to indicate that a comprehensive curriculum study such as an audit will, of necessity, include a review of some management functions, such as Board of Education policies related to curriculum and testing. It should also be noted that, in the present context, a curriculum audit is different from a management audit. A management or operations audit can be performed on any or all functions of a school district. How is the transportation system managed? How is the curriculum system managed? An administrative audit would look at such factors as adequacy of teacher preparation for assignments, certification, and efficient use of staff.

The model or process decided upon for the curriculum audit and subsequent activities is as follows.

1. A district wide needs assessment is conducted. CURRICULUM AUDIT.
2. The Board is informed of the audit recommendations and establishes a manageable number of goals. (This should secure the Board's commitment to the goals and to any actions in pursuit of the goals).
3. Analyze the audit recommendations to determine which are appropriate as staff development issues.
4. Relay the information to the appropriate committee(s) for action.
5. Determine staff development activities related to the recommendations.
6. Evaluate staff development activities to determine continuation or revision.

In closing, it should be noted that not all of the audit recommendations can be addressed through staff development. It should also be noted that some latitude for staff-initiated staff development activities should be provided, preferably after the audit and recommendations are made available for scrutiny. This could have the serendipitious effect of encouraging staff to self-select into staff development activities related to the audit recommendations.

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